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TREASURY FOR APARAMESWARAN

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SUBJECT: PRT JALALABAD: NEW NANGARHAR CHIEF OF POLICE APPOINTED

¶1. (SBU) Summary. Governor Gul Agha Sherzai welcomed newly appointed Nangarhar Police Chief Basir Salangi at a special ceremony on December 27 attended by district chiefs of police, the Nangarhar chief justice and other key judicial sector personnel. Sherzai, who has been active campaigning to keep Nangarhar free of opium poppies this year, called for an end to police bribery and illegal roadway tolls. He also expressed pride in the changed political climate in Afghanistan which enables the national government to appoint officials regardless of ethnicity to positions around the nation without fearing ethnic violence (Salangi is a Tajik taking a leadership role in a primarily Pashtun region). Salangi stated his priorities were fighting terrorism, counter-narcotics and eliminating bribery. Despite the pledges, many Nangarhar will be skeptical and suspect that Salangi's appointment is continuation of politics as usual rather than a chance to launch reform as touted by Governor Gul Agha Sherzai. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) Salangi, who hails from Parwan Province, most recently served for about a half a year as chief of police in Wardak Province following his removal as chief of police in Kabul, where he had served a short term of about a half a year. Salangi reportedly has no significant police training. He reportedly belonged to the same Northern Alliance mujahideen faction as Minister of Defense Wardak. Governor Sherzai, is also a former mujahideen commander, cited Salangi's bravery and background as fine qualifications for service in Nangarhar.

¶3. (SBU) Salangi, a polished speaker, played well to the audience - starting by emphasizing support for the national government. He then paid homage to fallen Pashtun national heroes Abdul Haq and Haji Qadi while noting his own status as a former mujahid. He expressed thanks the U.S.-led Coalition and the PRT for all they had done for the reconstruction of Afghanistan. Finally, he pledged to fight terrorism, narcotics, and bribery, the last of which he called "a significant threat to security."

¶4. (SBU) Outgoing Nangarhar Chief of Police Khalil Zaie (pronounced Zee), who reportedly will go to Faryab as chief of police, was not at ceremony. He left with a questionable local reputation after serving Nangarhar only since July. One district police chief as well as several police officials in Jalalabad told us that Zaie had put pressure on the district police chiefs to make substantial payments to him, resulting in a significant increase in extortion by the police at checkpoints stretching across Nangarhar from the border with Pakistan to the border with Kabul Province. We have heard from other sources that police pressure on truckers and others for "taxes" increased significantly last summer.

¶5. (SBU) One disturbing development prior to the start of the ceremony was the arrival of Wolesi Jirga (national parliament) member Hazrat Ali with two police vehicles donated by the PRT to the police. On the side of the vehicles was the slogan "donated by the People of the United States of America to the People of Nangarhar." Hazrat Ali, who was the chief of police prior to Zaie, supposedly was assigned these two vehicles for his protection prior to the September 18 elections but was supposed to return them afterwards. Other parliamentary candidates complained to UNAMA during the lead-up to the elections that Ali was using the vehicles to intimidate them and voters. Local police officials believe that the vehicles were "gifts" to Hazrat Ali from the Ministry of Interior. Local sources tell us that Hazrat Ali was rather corrupt as a chief of police. The PRT is working with our local MOI representative to obtain the return of these vehicles. (Note: the rumored price for a position as chief of police in a potentially lucrative province such as Nangarhar is one or two Toyota Landcruiser or a monetary equivalent, i.e. \$30 to \$50 thousand, even for someone with political connections. This might lead a cynic to wonder whether the two vehicles "given" to Hazrat Ali by the MOI were a "refund" since he was not appointed to another position as chief of police.)

Comment

¶6. (SBU) While we are not in possession of proof that allegations about Zaie's extortion activities are true, his arrival in Nangarhar did coincide with the slowdown in fuel shipments to Kabul and Bagram last summer which had serious national security implications. At that time a significant number of petroleum truck drivers sat at the Pakistan side of the border at Torkham, refusing to drive into Afghanistan on the grounds that the police payoffs had risen so high that they could not make any money on their deliveries. Coalition forces had to escort the

to Kabul and Bagram to break the stalemate and end the fuel shortage that was shutting down firms and stopping air line flights. Several our contacts have expressed concern in recent weeks that President Karzai is continuing his practice of re-appointing corrupt officials rather than replacing them with more capable men with better qualifications; Zaie's transfer to Faryab will be seen as confirmation of that concern.

¶7. (SBU) It is obviously too soon to judge Salangi. While he has made a good initial impression here, his two short stints as chief of police in Kabul and Wardak raise questions about why he was transferred so soon from those positions. Governor Sherzai, despite his problematic record in Kandahar, is proving to be a reform-oriented politician with considerable drive and charisma. While they both hit the same themes in their speeches, it is also not yet clear whether Sherzai will be able to work effectively with Salangi. End comment.

NEUMANN